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Ms. Helena Dalli
Commissioner for Equality
European Commission
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 16 April 2020

Re.: COVID19 and older persons

Dear Commissioner Dalli,

On behalf of AGE Platform Europe (AGE), the largest EU network of organisations of and for older persons, I would like to thank you for the joint letter you addressed together with Commissioner Schmit and Commissioner Kyriakides to EU Ministers asking them to use all available EU instruments to protect people in the most vulnerable situations as a result of the COVID19 crisis, among whom older persons. We would like to share with you our key concerns regarding the protection of the human rights of older persons living in institutions, which we have identified with the help from our members across the EU. You may read our full report [here](#).

As you are aware, older persons have high risks of mortality and severe illness due to COVID-19. As you rightly highlighted in your letter older people are also being affected disproportionately by the measures imposed as a response to COVID-19. Older people in residential care facilities are at a higher risk for adverse outcome and for infection due to living in close proximity to others and underlying comorbidities. In some countries over 50% of reported deaths are in nursing homes. Overall, we lack a full assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 on people living in care homes as reporting is incomplete.

We are particularly alarmed by the increasing evidence showcasing neglect of older persons living in nursing homes and the failure to provide them with necessary health, social and palliative care. There are also reports of older persons in care homes being pressured to sign 'do-not-resuscitate' orders. Equally worrying are cases of denial to transfer people living in residential facilities to hospitals for life-saving treatments. Such practices are unacceptable and amount to human rights violations.



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Persons living in institutions have equal rights to life-saving treatments and end-of-life care. In countries where the healthcare systems are under pressure prioritisation of scarce resources has to be made. But as you have rightly pointed out, such decisions should never be based on age or disability alone. Protocols based on non-medical criteria such as age or disability, deny persons their right to health and life on an equal basis with others. Medical protocols must be based on medical needs, scientific evidence and ethical principles.

As we have highlighted in our recent [press release](#) care professionals are also at high risk due to working in close interaction with residents and other staff, sometimes lacking essential protective equipment. In some cases, staff is inadequately trained, which puts a lot of burden to the remaining workers and creates a risk of neglect for older residents.

In the global response to COVID-19, it is essential that States and other actors protect the rights of older persons in institutions and those that work with them on an equal basis with others, without exception and in line with international standards.

We therefore urge you to ensure that future EU guidance and coordinated action regarding the pandemic identifies older persons in institutions as a group at particular risk in the context of COVID-19 and includes them in its priorities. In your recommendations to governments we highly encourage you to include the need for better monitoring and reporting about COVID-19 related deaths which are occurring in nursing homes, including the investigation of links between cases, with special attention to clusters of deaths in specific institutions. Support, training and protective equipment for staff and residents are also urgent tasks in the current context.

We are at your disposal to discuss the impact COVID-19 has on the human rights of older persons and remain,

Your sincerely,



Anne-Sophie Parent
Secretary General
AGE Platform Europe